DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 462 520 UD 034 828

TITLE	Case Study: Loganville High School, Loganville, Georgia. High Schools That Work.
INSTITUTION	Southern Regional Education Board, Atlanta, GA.
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	13p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Southern Regional Education Board, Publication Orders Department, 592 10th St., N.W., Atlanta, GA 30318-5790 (Item no. 00V42, $1 plus $2.50 shipping and handling). Tel: 404-875-9211, ext. 236; Fax: 404-872-1477. For full text: http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/publications/case_studies/Loganville.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; Academic Standards; Case Studies; *Educational Improvement; High Schools; Parent Participation; Teacher Expectations of Students; Technical Education; Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS	Georgia; High Schools That Work

ABSTRACT

This case study describes how an ordinary urban school, Loganville High School of Loganville, Georgia, reversed its pattern of low performance and became a Georgia School of Excellence by committing to a serious pursuit of whole-school improvement. Strategies included eliminating low-level classes, raising graduation requirements, involving parents in the advisement system, upgrading career/technical programs, and raising expectations. Progress in getting students to meet high standards is shown by the fact that overall achievement has improved, fewer students are dropping out, more students are entering college, fewer students take developmental courses, and more students are completing a challenging curriculum. The report discusses lessons learned (e.g., school leaders and teachers must stay focused on improving achievement); state policies that support Loganville's school improvement efforts (e.g., elimination of the general track and development of apprenticeship programs); further state help needed to sustain school improvement at Loganville (e.g., have career/technical courses aligned to standards for language arts, mathematics, and science); and how the Southern Regional Education Board assisted Loganville in school improvement via the High Schools That Work effort. (SM)

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HIGH SCHOOLS THAT WORK

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Case Study

Loganville High School

Loganville, Georgia

On Nov. 3, 1999, Loganville High School made national news when ABC-TV's nightly news with Peter Jennings spotlighted schools that are raising academic standards and student achievement. The school also received national acclaim in a feature article, "Fixing Your School," in the Oct. 9, 2000, edition of U.S. News & World Report. Its school improvement efforts and achievements notwithstanding, Loganville High School is like many U.S. schools. It is a medium-size school of 1,297 students and is an hour away from a large city. In Walton County, Loganville is between booming Atlanta and the college town of Athens. Urban sprawl has brought Loganville an increasingly transient population, higher school enrollment and more students who are not prepared for high school.

Loganville's leaders, teachers, students and parents are focused on improvement, but the school has not always had such a focus. This case study describes how an ordinary high school reversed a pattern of low performance and became a Georgia School of Excellence by committing to a serious pursuit of whole-school improvement.

The need for improvement

Academics didn't seem very important at Loganville High School 10 years ago. Its students scored an average of 810 on the SAT and ranked below the state average on Georgia's high school graduation test. The average daily attendance was only 88 percent. Many people thought of Loganville High School as "just a little country school where kids were not expected to be scholars." Students were not being pushed to achieve, and no one seemed concerned. Many students didn't care what they did in high school because nobody else cared what they did. Attendance was a serious problem; a school leader remembered one teacher saying, "If the students would just come to school, we can get them through." It was clear that Loganville's goal was not to prepare all students for further learning. Many school staff and parents thought that only students who knew they were going to college needed challenging courses and that it was fine for other students to "float" through high school by taking the easiest courses.

Loganville's strategies for whole-school improvement

Ken Prichard, associate superintendent for Walton County and principal when Loganville began its improvement effort, was not willing to accept his students' low achievement. As a former English teacher, Prichard knew that all students at Loganville could perform at higher levels under certain conditions:

- Students needed to take more challenging courses.
- Teachers needed to raise expectations in all classrooms.

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- Better teaching was needed in academic and career/technical classes.
- Teachers needed professional development and support to change what and how they taught.
- More students needed extra help.
- Parents needed to be included in planning their children's future after high school.

These things don't change overnight, though, and many school leaders and teachers do not receive the necessary support from the state and school districts to help them make the changes that really matter in improving student achievement. Prichard became "fired up" when he encountered the *High Schools That Work* program because he realized that its 10 key practices provided a structure for improving the whole school. After attending *HSTW*'s Summer Staff Development Conference in Birmingham, Ala., in 1993, Prichard led Loganville's staff in developing a school improvement plan that targeted the following components.

- *Eliminate low-level classes*

Two of the staff's first actions were eliminating low-level courses, such as general mathematics, and requiring all students to take Algebra I. Instead of offering three levels (basic, general and advanced) of U.S. history, the school taught U.S. history at an advanced level for all students. The mind-set shifted from just getting students through high school to getting all students to complete ***quality*** programs of study that prepared them for both further study and work. Impatient for state and district policies to end the general track and do away with low-level courses, Loganville's school leaders just did not tell students and their parents that those courses were available.

- *Raise graduation requirements*

The school raised its graduation requirements from 21 units in 1994 to 28 units for the class of 2003. In 1994 students could get general, vocational or college-prep diplomas. In 2000 the general diploma no longer was an option.

Minimum Graduation Requirements at Loganville High School

Class of 1994	Class of 2003
4 units in English	4 units in English
2 units in mathematics	3 units in mathematics (Algebra I and above)
2 units in science	3 units in science (including physics or physical science)
3 units in social studies	3 units in social studies
1 unit in health/physical education	1 unit in fine arts, computer technology,
1 unit in fine arts, vocational or computer technology	foreign language or a career/technical area
8 units in electives (including 4 units in a	1 unit in keyboarding and study skills
concentration for career/technical students)	1 unit in health/physical education
	12 units in electives (including 4 units
	in a concentration for career/technical students)

- *Involve parents in the advisement system*

Early in its school improvement effort Loganville built a solid guidance and advisement system that got parents and their children to work with a school representative in developing programs of study that would lead to further learning and in reviewing these programs annually. The annual one-on-one conferences have made a huge difference in engaging all parents in their children's learning. Loganville boasts that 100 percent of its parents participate in the conferences. **Students cannot receive schedules for the coming school year unless their parents attend the advisement sessions.** The school has created a flexible schedule that includes a two-week period for the annual meetings. Most teachers find that the sessions enable them to understand their students better and give them more support in getting students to work harder. One teacher said, "I would never go back to the old way of just letting students sign up for whatever they want to take."

Teachers have learned that most parents really want to get more involved in supporting their children's learning but do not know how. One parent said: "I have learned so much about my own child and his high school through this advisement session. I really want to get more involved, especially since I now realize that the teachers really care about their students." School leaders and teachers say that the sessions are essential to prevent students from "getting lost in the shuffle."

No high school has enough counselors to make sure that every student stays focused and motivated to work hard in school. Loganville addressed this problem by developing a teacher-adviser program. Each teacher and administrator, including the principal, advises 18 to 20 students throughout high school to provide these students and their parents with personalized guidance on preparing for further learning. Besides meeting annually with parents, teacher-advisers meet with their students each Wednesday for 25 or 50 minutes. Teachers receive intensive training in exactly what to do during the advisory sessions.

- *Upgrade career/technical programs*

Loganville has replaced its low-status career/technical courses with those that connect to modern career areas and incorporate high-level mathematics, science and English. Classes are offered in early childhood education, integrated manufacturing technology, health occupations, drafting/pre-engineering, computer science and communications technology. Career/technical teachers have shifted from teaching procedures to teaching how to analyze problems and how to use the technology of the field in solving them. Students in career/technical courses are expected to read a great deal and to use mathematics in completing assignments that include research projects.

Students taking the course on integrated manufacturing technology are expected to do mathematics homework every week. The students also have to apply mathematics constantly in their work. For example, they use trigonometry to calculate drill points and angles in their designs. Students also must read the many manuals that describe how to manufacture different products. "Students in my class must learn how to create and build products that suit specific needs," the teacher said. "I don't tell them what to do. They have to figure it out on their own because that is what they will have to do in the real world." Students in the class said that they can solve the problems only by reading the technical manuals. If they don't read the manuals, they "end up building a lousy product." Students also are required to

keep written portfolios of their work. One student said: "I do my best on my assignments because I know that I want to put them in my portfolio. The portfolio can help me get a job because it is proof that I have done something and know how to do things in this field."

In their effort to eliminate low-level career/technical courses, Loganville's leaders realized that the traditional child-care courses were often "cut-and-paste" courses that did not prepare students for further learning. School leaders worked with the teacher of family and consumer sciences to develop a challenging early-childhood program for students interested in becoming teachers. The standards for the courses are linked to college and university courses. Students are expected to read books and several articles and to write at least 15 essays in each of the four courses in the concentration. To complete the program they also must teach a unit of one of the courses. Each student works with one or two other students to develop the teaching objectives for the unit, prepare the lesson plans, teach the course, develop tests for assessing student learning, grade the tests, give students feedback on their performance and listen to critiques of their teaching skills from their "students." Students in the program also are expected to observe a teacher once a week; work with preschool children for two semesters; observe teachers from the lower grades; and write up their observations. Each student also must complete a portfolio that includes a job application that he or she has completed; a résumé; a cover letter for the application and résumé; a newsletter that he or she has prepared; and one month of lesson plans that include scope and sequence of the content for a particular grade. Students in this program said that these courses are among the toughest in the high school and are the ones in which they have learned the most.

Another way that Loganville has upgraded its career/technical programs is to develop youth apprenticeship programs. For instance, the top six seniors in the early childhood program have the option of spending an hour and a half per day teaching in a middle grades or elementary school. These students are paid for their work and, if they earn grades of 85 or higher, they may get college credit for the class at one of 13 colleges and universities in Georgia. Participating colleges include Young Harris, Georgia Southern, Kennesaw, North Georgia and Valdosta State. The University of Georgia accepts the credit if the students complete their first two years of college at one of the state's two-year colleges. A teacher educator said, "Students completing Loganville's early childhood program enter my college program knowing more about teaching than the majority of the college seniors in my program."

Loganville also has an apprenticeship program with Cisco Systems for juniors and seniors. Students particularly like this program because they are learning "cutting-edge" technology through intensive lab work. One student said: "I have worked very hard to get into and stay in this program because I know it's where I want to be when I graduate. I will be able to start my career when I graduate from high school and go to college part time." If they remain with Cisco for two years and have taken the challenging mathematics courses, they may be offered jobs with salaries of $40,000 per year.

- *Raise expectations and get students to meet them*

In conjunction with eliminating low-level courses and increasing graduation requirements, Loganville's teachers had to raise expectations in all classrooms. Many teachers realized quickly that they also had to use strategies that motivate students to work harder to meet higher standards. One English teacher — who is typical of several in the language arts department — requires his students to read 12

books each year, write one to three pages each week and do a research paper. His tests all are essay tests. His students say that his tests require them to "think very hard in analyzing what we have read and express ourselves clearly and accurately in writing. He's tough, but that's good." He always holds students accountable for what they read. One of his less-traditional methods is using reading circles for students to discuss what they have read and then giving them tests. In teaching grammar, he sometimes writes an interesting and funny essay that contains many errors and expects each student to edit the essay. In completing research papers on current events or other topics, his students must include Internet sources as well as more conventional sources, must prepare PowerPoint presentations and must attack or defend positions on topics.

Progress in getting students to meet high standards

Achievement at Loganville High School has improved. Fewer students are dropping out. More students are entering colleges and universities, and fewer need to take developmental courses. More students are completing a challenging curriculum.

- *Overall achievement has improved.*

The percentage of Loganville's first-time test-takers who passed the Georgia High School Graduation Test increased between 1994-95 and 1999-2000 in English/language arts, mathematics, writing, social studies and science. Loganville's passage rate of 100 percent on the writing test can be attributed to school leaders' expectation that all teachers give weekly writing assignments and include at least one essay question on every test. The percentage of all Loganville students who passed the reading test of the Georgia High School Graduation Test increased from 97 percent in 1995 to 100 percent in 2000, compared with 93 percent statewide in 2000.

Percentages of Loganville High School First-time Test-takers Passing Georgia's High School Graduation Test

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000
Language Arts	96%	94%	95%	97%	98%	99%
Writing	97	94	97	97	98	100
Mathematics	90	89	93	96	97	98
Science	81	67	87	87	87	88
Social Studies	87	86	86	83	87	96

The average verbal and mathematics scores on the SAT improved between 1994-95 and 1999-2000. The percentage of students who took the SAT also increased from 55 percent to 66 percent during that period.

Average SAT Scores at Loganville High School Between 1994-95 and 1999-2000

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000
Verbal	406	501	479	474	489	489
Mathematics	423	469	471	467	478	481

The percentage of students at Loganville High School who earned scores of 3 or higher on Advanced Placement tests grew from 24 percent in 1994-95 to 46 percent in 1998-99.

The percentages of Loganville students who participated in the *HSTW* Assessment and achieved the *HSTW* performance goals in reading, mathematics and science increased or remained the same from 1998 to 2000.

Percentages of Loganville High School Students Scoring at or above the *HSTW* Performance Goals in 1998 and 2000

	1998	2000
Reading	41%	71%
Mathematics	41	83
Science	25	78

- The attendance rate increased from 87 percent in 1992-93 to 96 percent in 1998-99.

Attendance Rates for Loganville High School Students Between 1992-93 and 1998-99

	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99
Attendance rate	87%	90%	93%	96%	96%	96%	96%

- The percentage of students planning postsecondary studies increased between 1994-95 and 1998-99, while the percentage of graduates taking developmental reading courses at the postsecondary level decreased from 45 percent to 24 percent during that period.

Percentages of Students Undertaking Further Study and Taking Developmental Courses Between 1994-95 and 1998-99

	1994-95	1996-97	1998-99
Attended college/university	37%	48%	63%
Attended a trade/technical school	1	3	23
Took developmental reading course at the postsecondary level	45	22	24

- The percentage of students graduating from Loganville High School in four years increased from 67 percent in 1995-96 to 81 percent in 1998-99. The dropout rate decreased from 8 percent in 1995-96 to 3.2 percent in 1999-2000.

Dropout Rate at Loganville High School Between 1995-96 and 1999-2000

	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000
Dropout rate	8%	2%	4%	4%	3.2%

- More students at Loganville are completing the "right courses."

The percentage of students participating in the *HSTW* Assessment who completed the *HSTW*-recommended curriculum increased between 1995-96 and 1999-2000.

Percentages of Students Completing the *HSTW*-recommended Curriculum in English, Mathematics and Science

	1995-96	1999-2000
English	25%	56%
Mathematics	25	78
Science	16	48

More students are earning college-preparatory or career-preparatory diplomas now than five years ago. Likewise, fewer students are earning a general diploma. In 1998-99, only two percent of Loganville's seniors received a "general" diploma, compared with 25 percent in 1994-95.

Percentage of High School Students Receiving Various Types of Diplomas Between 1994-95 and 1998-99

	1994-95	1998-99
College-prep	35%	56%
Career-prep	26	30
Dual seal	14	12
General	25	2

- The percentage of students participating in the *HSTW* Assessment who completed AP or college-preparatory English 12 and college-preparatory biology increased between 1997-98 and 1999-2000.

Percentages of Students Completing College-prep English 12 and Biology Courses

	1997-98	1999-2000
AP or college-preparatory English 12	47%	53%
College-prep biology	17	20

Lessons learned

- School leaders and teachers need to stay focused on improving achievement because it is easy to get sidetracked on less important things and achievement easily can begin to slip.
- Have a clear and manageable vision. Schools need to know precisely what they need to do and need to build school improvement efforts incrementally to prevent teachers and school leaders from getting burned out.
- Always keep the vision of school improvement in front of teachers; it helps them set priorities.
- School leaders should not ask teachers to do anything that the leaders themselves are not willing to do. All members of the school staff need to know that they are part of a team and should be encouraged to help each other and share their successes and challenges.

- Never underestimate the power of the connection between home and school. Parents want to know at least one person at the school whom they always can call. Most parents support raising standards for their children, but they need to be invited personally to join the school in its mission to get their children to meet higher standards.

Plans for the future

- Develop a ninth-grade academy to address problems associated with the transition from the middle grades to high school.
- Institute the senior project.
- Require students to take pre-algebra in the middle grades.
- Provide common planning time for academic and career/technical teachers.
- Develop guidelines for all teachers to use in grading students' written work.
- Involve students in working with teachers to develop a Web-based journal of teachers' reflections on their successes and challenges in school improvement.
- Eliminate low-level courses in language arts.

State policies that support Loganville's school improvement efforts

- *State requirement to eliminate the general track*

In the early 1990s the state reduced students' options for types of high school diplomas to two — or a combination of the two: a college-prep seal and a tech-prep seal. Both options require all students to take Algebra I. Assistant Superintendent Prichard said that the changes in the graduation requirements made it easier for the school to get ***all*** students to take algebra. He added, "These changes affirmed that we were on the right road and that it is important to get all students to take more challenging courses." School leaders hope that state policy-makers will continue to support schools in replacing low-level courses with challenging ones by establishing the same challenging academic core for all students and by requiring students to take pre-algebra in the middle grades. Prichard added: "Even though our career/technical students are doing better than their peers in other states and schools, they aren't doing well enough. We still let them off the hook. When they take the SAT, they often have terrible scores if they haven't taken the right courses. We are simply fooling ourselves if we think that they don't need the challenging courses." He said he believes that parents of students in the middle grades would push their children harder if only one type of diploma were available in high school.

- *The state's high school graduation exam*

To get a high school diploma in Georgia, students must pass a graduation exam that covers English, mathematics, writing and science. The exam, given in the 11th grade, is the only set of tests that is mandated for the entire class and gives schools a good sense of how well they are preparing their stu-

dents. Students know that they have to pass the test to graduate and that what they learn in classes will determine whether they pass. To push students to perform well on all parts of the test, Loganville leaders stepped up discussion of the test's importance during the advisement sessions with all students' parents, especially during the ninth-grade sessions. Career/technical teachers have played a large role in improving the passing rates by giving more reading and writing assignments.

- *The HOPE Scholarship*

Loganville's students have found that Georgia's HOPE Scholarship motivates them to work harder in school. Getting good grades suddenly has become important for all students, especially those who previously might have thought that further learning was a financial impossibility. Students with at least a B average who enter a degree program at a Georgia public college or university may obtain a HOPE Scholarship to cover tuition, mandatory fees and most books. The HOPE Scholarship rewards high performance and gives students a chance to "earn" their way to postsecondary study.

- *The state's apprenticeship law*

Like most schools, Loganville used to have many students who participated in the old co-op programs, through which youths would "earn more than they would learn." In 1995 state legislation provided funds and criteria for establishing apprenticeship programs for high school youths; these programs were to focus on strengthening the connection between learning at school and learning in the workplace. As a result, Loganville worked with business leaders to develop youth apprenticeships for students interested in fields such as teaching, high-tech industries, health professions and culinary arts. School leaders attribute the strength of their apprenticeship programs to the state's apprenticeship law, which provides resources for schools and groups of schools to operate apprenticeship programs. The school upgraded its career/technical programs in ways that attracted high-quality businesses to offer youth apprenticeships. Each program must integrate school- and work-based learning, must have a work-site mentor for students and must provide students with experiences in all aspects of the industry. Loganville's apprenticeship programs facilitate the transition from secondary to postsecondary education by enabling the apprentice to earn a high school diploma, postsecondary credential or diploma, and a certificate of occupational skills. The certificate is a credential issued by the Georgia Department of Education and approved by business/industry; it certifies that a student has mastered skills at levels recognized by industry.

- *State funds for professional development*

To make substantive changes in curriculum and instruction that would result in improved achievement, Loganville's leaders knew that they had to invest in training their teachers. Flexible use of state funds has helped them to achieve this goal. Georgia allocates professional-development funds to each school district based on the number of full-time-equivalent (FTE) students. Schools are free to use the funds according to their needs. For example, the principal used these funds in 1993 to take a team of teachers to their first *HSTW* conference. The team would meet each evening of the conference to share what they had learned and to determine which sessions they would attend the next day. Team members

identified outstanding workshop leaders whom they wanted to run workshops for their whole school. The team returned to school "fired up" and worked immediately on a school improvement plan.

The state also runs summer workshops to train teachers how to integrate academic and career/technical studies. Over time Loganville has sent several mathematics and science teachers to those workshops. Upon returning to school the teachers ran mini-workshops for their colleagues.

- *State funds to develop new career/technical programs and to upgrade equipment*

Loganville received start-up funds from the state to assist in building a new school in 1998. School and district leaders used some of the funds to create new career/technical programs, revise the few programs they had, and upgrade equipment and curriculum in all career/technical programs. The new programs include integrated manufacturing, early childhood education and technology education. The state legislature also provided a substantial amount of money in 1994 to help schools develop technology labs. Loganville used these funds to equip their labs with state-of-the-art computers, tools and other machines.

- *State funds for extra help*

State efforts to increase graduation requirements and to improve what is taught work best to raise achievement when schools have a system of extra help that enables low-performing students to catch up. Loganville's leaders praise recent state legislation that supports extra help by allocating funds for an extra 20 days, which local systems may use to extend either the school day or school year and to provide low-performing high school students with extra help.

Further state help needed to sustain school improvement at Loganville

- Require all students — including career/technical students — to complete four units of language arts courses that require them to read 10 to 15 books annually and write weekly essays of one to three pages.
- Require all schools to develop advisement systems that mandate annual meetings, beginning in grade eight, that include a high school representative, each student and his or her parents or guardians.
- Have career/technical courses aligned to standards for language arts, mathematics and science.
- Require each student who wants to earn a career/technical seal to pass a technical literacy exam in his or her field.

How SREB has assisted Loganville in school improvement

Loganville High School has participated in the *HSTW* network since 1993. Assistant Superintendent Prichard said his school's improvement has been built on the *HSTW* framework of proven practices, the assessment and the dissemination of information about those practices through conferences

and publications. "SREB helps us realize that other schools have similar problems and we can all gain so much from others' successes and failures. It helps us target things that need to change."

School and district leaders say that *HSTW* also has provided the school with:

- a sharp and continuous focus on the things that matter most in improving student achievement;
- quality professional development to help teachers learn the important strategies for improving student achievement;
- an assessment that links student achievement to school and classroom practices and includes information on those practices;
- opportunities to network with other school leaders and teachers who successfully are working toward the same goals;
- additional technical assistance through SREB's *New American High Schools That Work* initiative to help the school earn distinction from the U.S. Department of Education; and
- recognition for focusing the school on its most important mission: student achievement.

Prichard stressed the uniqueness of the *HSTW* Assessment in providing the school with information that leaders and teachers can use. Loganville's teachers and principal review the data annually in determining priorities for the next school year. "The student and teacher survey data help us think about important things that we are doing or that we should do," Prichard said. School staff always discuss some items from the results at faculty meetings to help stay focused on the things that are associated with high achievement.

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